

# Conservation SHOWCASE



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## NRCS

Natural Resources  
Conservation Service

## Mason Farm “Critter Pad” EQIP Project

Robin Mason saw the water coming before she heard the flood warnings on the radio. Mason gathered all of her horses in the barn like usual, but panic swept over her as she and forty-five head of horses waited anxiously to see if the water would rise to the second floor of her ninety-four-year-old barn. Would the horses survive the night?

Water poured in through the heat vent in her trailer, where she was living while her house was remodeled, and she watched out the window

as the water flowed into the barn. The farm had flooded in years past, most recently in 1996, but this flood was much worse.

On that stormy night in the spring of 2009, Mason decided things had to change. She and her horses survived, but the water took two days to recede. The barn, which was built in 1918, had never flooded that badly before.

“It was terrifying. I couldn’t sleep after that night,” says Mason. “After 2009 I had to have some help or I would have to leave. I’ve got a good business but it was going to be over if I couldn’t find a solution.”

Mason raises and trains race horses along the Snoqualmie River near Carnation, WA. During the peak of her season, she has as many as 70 horses on her sixty-eight acre property. Fearing another

**Above: Robin Mason points to the watermark left behind after her barn flooded in 2009.**



**The “critter pad,” pictured above, allows animals to have high ground where they can wait out a flood.**

flood, she went looking for help. She found Clare Flanagan with USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

“When I met Clare, it was like a breath of fresh air,” Mason said.

Flanagan introduced Mason to the concept of an elevated livestock refuge pad, or “critter pad” where animals can be moved during high water events. Mason was unsure of how the process worked, but Flanagan showed her how to apply for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP.) In 2010 Mason was awarded a contract to receive incentive payments to help with the cost of installing the pad.

“Clare was so supportive...I was worried, but she wasn’t,” said Mason with a smile.

NRCS works with private landowners to solve natural resource problems. A number of issues arise when flooding occurs, one of which is poor water quality due to animal mortality.

With the critter pad, animals have high ground where they can wait out the flood.

“Cost-sharing on critter pads was new to NRCS and the EQIP program,” says Clare Flanagan, resource conservationist for NRCS. “But King County expedited the permit process and coordinated with our engineer to complete all of the modeling for the pads.”

According to Flanagan, NRCS was able to install critter pads for three landowners who applied for funding in 2010 in record time before the next flood.

“Some people don’t know where to go to get help,” says Mason. Now, she is directing fellow landowners to NRCS when they don’t know where to turn.

“This [pad] will save the horses’ lives,” Mason said.

Thanks to NRCS, she is once again sleeping soundly.